

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for managing electronic mail messages to be received over a distributed computer network by a plurality of users, said method comprising the
- 5 steps of:
- retrieving over the distributed computer network electronic mail messages addressed to a first of said plurality of users; and
- retrieving over the distributed computer network status information regarding any unread electronic mail messages addressed to remaining ones of the
- 10 plurality of users.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of retrieving electronic mail messages includes the step of logging onto the distributed computer network to establish communication with a server on which said electronic mail messages are
- 15 stored.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the step of logging onto the distributed computer network is performed only by said first of the plurality of users.
- 20 4. The method of claim 1, wherein said retrieving steps are performed on a user interface device and said plurality of users have been previously registered as users of said user interface device.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said status information includes a representation of the number of unread electronic mail messages available for the remaining ones of the plurality of users.

5           6. The method of claim 5, wherein said status information further includes an identifier of the sender of each of the unread electronic mail messages.

10           7. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of displaying said status information on a display of a user interface device.

10           8. The method of claim 5, further comprising the step of displaying said status information on a display of a user interface device.

15           9. The method of claim 8, wherein said plurality of users have been previously registered as users of said user interface device and said displaying step includes the step of displaying a window that identifies said previously registered users.

20           10. The method of claim 9, wherein said identification of previously registered users includes a selectable icon for each of the previously registered users.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein said selectable icons specify the respective names of the previously registered users.

12. The method of claim 10, further comprising the step of selecting one of the selectable icons to initiate a login procedure for establishing communication with the distributed computer network.

13. The method of claim 2, wherein the step of logging onto the distributed computer network includes the step of entering a password into a text-box of the window.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein the step of establishing communication with the distributed computer network includes the step of entering a password into a text-box of the window.

15. A computer-readable storage medium for storing data for access by a computer program being executed on a user interface device, comprising:  
a first data structure stored on said medium for retrieving over a distributed computer network electronic mail messages addressed to a first one of a plurality of users; and

a second data structure stored on said medium for retrieving over the distributed computer network status information regarding any unread electronic mail messages addressed to remaining ones of the plurality of users.

16. The medium of claim 15, wherein said first data structure includes a pointer to a window to be displayed on the user interface device.

5           17. The medium of claim 15, wherein said first data structure is operative to retrieve electronic mail messages after logging onto the distributed computer network to establish communication with a server on which said electronic mail messages are stored.

10           18. The medium of claim 17, wherein said first data structure is operative to perform said retrieving steps after the step of logging onto the distributed computer network is performed by only said first of the plurality of users.

15           19. The medium of claim 15, wherein said first and second data storage structures are operative on a user interface device and said plurality of users have been previously registered as users of said user interface device.

20           20. The medium of claim 15, wherein said status information includes a representation of the number of unread electronic mail messages available for the remaining ones of the plurality of users.

21. The medium of claim 20, wherein said status information further includes an identifier of the sender of each of the unread electronic mail messages.

22. The medium of claim 15, further comprising a third data structure for displaying said status information on a display of a user interface device.

5           23. The medium of claim 22, wherein said status information is displayed on a display of a user interface device.

24. The medium of claim 16, further comprising a third data structure for displaying said status information in said window.

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25. The medium of claim 24, wherein said plurality of users have been previously registered as users of said user interface device and said window identifies said previously registered users.

15           26. The medium of claim 25, wherein said identification of previously registered users includes a selectable icon for each of the previously registered users.

27. The medium of claim 26, wherein said selectable icons specify the  
20    respective names of the previously registered users.

28. The medium of claim 27, wherein said selectable icons are operative to initiate a login procedure for establishing communication with the distributed computer network.

5           29. The medium of claim 28, wherein said window includes a text-box for entering a password for completing the login procedure.

30. A system containing a user interface for recipients of electronic mail messages, comprising:

10           a processing unit, system memory, and an input/output device;

            a system bus coupling said processing unit, said system memory, and said input/output device; and

            an electronic mail program module located in said system memory operative to: (1) retrieve over a distributed computer network electronic mail messages addressed to a first one of a plurality of users; and (2) retrieve over the distributed computer network status information regarding any unread electronic mail messages addressed to remaining ones of the plurality of users.

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31. The system of claim 30, further comprising a local message store operative to store the electronic mail messages received over the distributed computer network; and a database operative to store message-related information received over the network.

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32. The system of claim 30, wherein said input/output device includes a display and said system memory has a first data structure that includes a pointer to a window to be displayed on the display.

5           33. The system of claim 30, wherein said system memory includes a first data structure that is operative to retrieve electronic mail messages after logging onto the distributed computer network to establish communication with a server on which said electronic mail messages are stored.

10           34. The system of claim 33, wherein said first data structure is operative to retrieve the electronic mail messages of said first one of the plurality of users and said status information after only said first of the plurality of users has logged in to the network.

15           35. The system of claim 30, wherein said plurality of users have been previously registered as system users and said status information includes a representation of the number of unread electronic mail messages available for the remaining ones of the plurality of users.

20           36. The system of claim 30, wherein said status information further includes an identifier of the sender of each of the unread electronic mail messages.

37. The system of claim 32, wherein said plurality of users have been previously registered as system users and said window identifies said system users.

38. The system of claim 37, wherein said identification of said system users  
5 includes a selectable icon for each of the system users.

39. The system of claim 38, wherein said selectable icons specify the respective names of the system users.

10 40. The system of claim 39, wherein said selectable icons are operative to initiate a login procedure for establishing communication with the distributed computer network.

41. The system of claim 40, wherein said window includes a text-box for  
15 entering a password for completing the login procedure.